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ABSTRACT

This paper sketches an interpretive and evaluative framework for examining literacy policy agendas. The paper consists of four sections. Its first section presents a brief overview of some key elements in the current National Literacy Plan for Australia. Its second section advances a broad goal for literacy education which is consistent with current national policy goals as formally stated, and which is hoped would be acceptable to members of the Australian College of Education. The components of the proposed framework are presented in the paper's third section. Finally, the paper briefly outlines some typical applications of the framework to current policy trends to test its potential as an interpretive and evaluative tool in the area of literacy policy. (Contains 28 references.) (NKA)

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Frameworks and Workframes: Literacy Policies and New Orders.

by Colin Lankshear

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Frameworks and Workframes:

Literacy Policies and New Orders

Colin Lankshear

Introduction

This paper sketches an interpretive and evaluative framework for examining literacy policy agendas. It contains four sections. The first presents a brief overview of some key elements in the current National Literacy Plan. In the second section I advance a broad goal for literacy education which is consistent with current national policy goals as formally stated, and which I hope would be acceptable to members of the Australian College of Education. The components of my proposed framework are presented in the third section. Finally, I briefly outline some typical applications of the framework to current policy trends in order to test its potential as an interpretive and evaluative tool in the area of literacy policy.

In what follows, I will consider the emerging National Literacy and Numeracy Plan for Schools from the standpoint of asking what would be involved in making the policy work in educationally acceptable ways. I do not critique the policy per se but, rather, aim to interpret it as richly and expansively as possible, and to identify things that need to be done and need to be avoided for its successful implementation.

A policy context

The 'National Literacy and Numeracy Plan for Schools' provides the immediate policy context. Commonwealth, State, and Territory ministers have agreed to a national goal that 'every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level' (DEETYA 1998: 9). They have also agreed to a subsidiary goal that 'every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years' (ibid.). Apart from the ambiguity in the statement of the subsidiary goal, the two goals seem unexceptionable as they stand.

The plan builds on three key purposes. These are to:

· develop strong foundational literacy and numeracy skills for students in the early years as the basis for progress in all future schooling;

· develop, for students throughout the years of schooling, effective literacy and numeracy skills to support successful participation in the post-school years in training, work, or further study;

· develop high levels of proficiency in English literacy, and numeracy, as a matter of major importance for all Australians' personal, social and cultural development. (ibid.)

The plan outlines six related strategic components:

· assessment of all students by their teachers as early as possible in the first years of schooling;

· early intervention strategies for those students identified as having difficulty;

· the development of agreed benchmarks for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, against which all children's achievement in these years can be measured;

· the measurement of students' progress against these benchmarks using rigorous state-based assessment procedures, with all year 3 students being assessed against the benchmarks from 1998 onwards, and against the Year 5 benchmark as soon as possible;

· progress towards national reporting on student achievement against the benchmarks, with reporting commencing in 1999 within the framework of the annual National Report on Schooling in Australia; and

· professional development for teachers to support the key elements of the Plan. (ibid.: 10)

The National Plan - goals, purposes, and strategies - as outlined here provides the policy context for developing and applying the framework that follows. I will begin this work by

framing an expansive overarching goal for literacy education. This, as noted above, is consistent with the formal goals asserted in the Plan and helps give them shape and direction.

An overarching goal for literacy education

Literacy is not an end in itself. Rather, literacy can only meaningfully be understood in relation to social practices and purposes that are mediated by (semiotic) texts, and where texts are produced, distributed, received, exchanged, and otherwise negotiated as an integral part of pursuing the practices or purposes in question. Hence, the educational imperative to 'make people literate' is not simply so they can deal with texts. Rather, it is to allow them to participate in larger practices and realise larger purposes to which texts are integral - but for which (mere) competence with texts typically is not sufficient on its own.

These larger practices and purposes are, of course, not uniform for all persons in a society. There is no finite universal set. That is, people are different: they engage in highly diverse practices and purposes that are socially legitimate. And new literacy-mediated practices and purposes are evolving all the time. Moreover, there is no single criterion or point of reference for determining which specific purposes, practices, and literacies are necessary and valid. We cannot, for example, settle matters by reference to personal aspirations alone, or national priorities. The social contract cuts multiple ways. Societies are bound to do what they can to maximise legitimate forms of personal, group, and collective fulfillment. At the same time, individuals, groups, and collectives are obliged to contribute to the society that creates and maintains conditions for human pursuits and practices. A defensible and proper literacy education, then, is a subset of a wider ideal which seeks to optimise the balance between legitimate personal, group, and various kinds of collective (e.g., national economic, civic, etc.) goals, purposes and interests, and which seeks to promote a fair balance of legitimate satisfactions across social groupings.

Accordingly, an overarching goal for literacy may be stated as follows: 'The goal of literacy education is to pursue the achievement of a universally literate populace who employ literacies effectively in pursuing their various individual and shared social, cultural, and economic purposes, in the interests/for the benefits of all on an equitable basis.' This goal obviously gives a broad inflection to the goals stated in the National Plan and, indeed, to the Plan itself. I would argue that it is the proper inflection for a democratic society.

A framework for examining literacy policy

The framework I propose has five components, to be described in turn. These are:

· literacy policies and efforts to implement them must be informed by a sociocultural perspective and, specifically, by awareness of the relationship between mastery of graphic signs and being literate;

· literacy must be seen as having three interrelated dimensions - 'operational', 'cultural' and 'critical'.

· literacy education must take account of post-typographic developments associated with the current and ongoing shift from a monopoly by print to ever greater significant of the digital-electronic apparatus

· literacy education should be informed by awareness of significant contemporary trends and patterns that are captured in the notion of a 'new word order'.

· literacy education should be informed by leading edge theories of pedagogy and learning associated with cultural apprenticeship approaches.

i. A sociocultural view of literacy

Until recently, literacy has typically been understood in terms of reading and writing or, as Gee (1996: 49) puts it, as the ability to read and write. For many, literacy has simply meant having encoding and decoding skills. These were seen in turn as building blocks for doing other things - such as comprehending, engaging in classroom learning, studying curriculum subjects, and so on. This is a view of literacy which stands in some kind of linear relationship to 'other things', and is inherent in the notion of 'foundational literacy' foregrounded in the National Plan.

On this view, once one is literate, or has mastered the basics/foundations of literacy, one can get on with doing other things - including, it seems, pursuing higher order literacies, subject

study, work, and the like. That is, once people are literate they can use literacy in all sorts of ways - individually and/or more collectively - as a tool or means for pursuing diverse benefits (employment, knowledge, recreational pleasure, personal development, economic growth, innovation, etc.). This is what Street (1984) calls the 'autonomous' model of literacy. Literacy is seen as a unitary phenomenon (e.g., a tool, technology, identifiable set of skills). As such, it can serve as a means to further ends, acting as an independent variable which brings about outcomes in its own power. This '(basic) skill', 'tool', 'ability', 'technology' view of literacy has, of course, long been associated with theoretical variants from Psychology and its educational sub-fields of theory and research - e.g., cognitive development, developmental psychology, behavioural psychology, and so on.

During the 1970s and 80s, however, a sociocultural approach to understanding and researching literacy became increasingly established. From this standpoint, literacy is best understood as referring to 'the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing' (Street 1984: 1), not as some 'singular' self-contained phenomenon which we can use in the manner of a tool for achieving purposes extrinsic to it. Rather, literacy is really literacies, since print-based activities take many different forms - some of which are very unlike others in terms of purposes, the kinds of texts involved, and so on. According to a sociocultural approach these differences must be seen as residing in the literacies themselves, rather than outside or independently of them, since we never learn, teach, or employ literacy 'skills' in context-free ways, but always within some context or practice. Hence, literacy is not an independent variable, producing effects outside of itself. Rather, literacy is inseparable from practices in which they are embedded and the effects of these practices. Literacies always come in association with practical purposes and are always embedded within larger practices: e.g., running a home, completing an assignment, organising an event, giving orders, exchanging information, being at leisure, and so on (Green 1997a and b; Lankshear, Bigum et al 1997; Gee 1996; Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996; Lankshear with Lawler 1987).

I take this broad sociocultural view of literacy, according to which the traditional notion of literacy as (the capacity for) reading and writing is inadequate, to be a more accurate and educationally defensible account. Indeed, as several authors in a recent publication (Prinsloo and Breier 1996) argue convincingly, endless examples of literate practices can be provided in which individuals' actual encoding and decoding abilities in the conventional sense are strictly minimal, if not practically non existent (see also Gee 1991, 1996). The point here is not that encoding and encoding print are unimportant; less still that they are not integral components of perhaps the big majority of cases we would properly describe as literate. Rather, the point is that ability to encode and decode print (at whatever level of competence we care to stipulate) is not equivalent with being literate, and is by no means a sure foundation for effective, powerful and expansive literacy practices. To make the point by

means of James Gee's examples, it is perfectly possible to be able to encode and decode the pages of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind without being capable of reading it in any meaningful sense of 'reading'.

ii. The three dimensional view of literacy

From a sociocultural perspective, literacy must be seen in '3D', as having three interlocking dimensions - the operational, the cultural, and the critical - which bring together language, meaning and context (Green 1988: 160-163; Green 1997a, 1997b). An integrated view of literacy in practice and in pedagogy addresses all three dimensions simultaneously; none has any necessary priority over the others.

The operational dimension refers to the 'means' of literacy, in the sense that it is in and through the medium of language that the literacy event happens. It involves competency with regard to the language system. To refer to the operational dimension of literacy is to point to the manner in which individuals use language in literacy tasks, in order to operate effectively in specific contexts. The emphasis is on the written language system and how adequately it is handled. From this perspective, it is a question of individuals being able to read and write in a range of contexts, in an appropriate and adequate manner. This is to focus on the language aspect of literacy (see Green 1988, 1997a, 1997b; Lankshear, Bigum et al 1997 vol. 1).

The cultural dimension involves what may be called the meaning aspect of literacy. It involves competency with regard to the meaning system. This is to recognise that literacy acts and events are not only context specific but also entail a specific content. It is never simply a case of being literate in and of itself but of being literate with regard to something, some aspect of knowledge or experience. The cultural aspect of literacy is a matter of understanding texts in relation to contexts - to appreciate their meaning; the meaning they need to make in order to be appropriate; and what it is about given contexts of practice that makes for appropriateness or inappropriateness of particular ways of reading and writing. Take, for example, the case of a worker producing a spreadsheet within a workplace setting or routine. This is not a simple matter of 'going into some software program' and 'filling in the data. Spreadsheets must be compiled - which means knowing their purpose and constructing their axes and categories accordingly. To know the purpose of a particular spreadsheet requires understanding relevant elements of the culture of the immediate work context; to know why one is doing what one is doing now, how to do it, and why what one

is doing is appropriate (ibid.).

The critical dimension of literacy has to do with the socially constructed nature of all human practices and meaning systems. In order to be able to participate effectively and productively in any social practice, humans must be socialised into it. But social practices and their meaning systems are always selective and sectional; they represent particular interpretations and classifications. Unless individuals are also given access to the grounds for selection and the principles of interpretation they are merely socialised into the meaning system and unable to take an active part in its transformation. The critical dimension of literacy is the basis for ensuring that participants can not merely participate in a practice and make meanings within it, but can in various ways transform and actively produce it (ibid.).

The debate currently emerging in Australia around benchmarks and literacy standards provides a rich context and a powerful incentive for clarifying the relationship between notions of 'reading' and 'writing', 'text', 'meaning' and 'practice'. The nature and importance of a sociocultural approach to literacy within the context of this debate become key considerations.

From the sociocultural perspective, any concern with reading, writing, literacy, inevitably ends up at social practices which integrate talk, action, interaction, values, beliefs, goals, purposes, aspirations, ideals, ways of behaving, and so on. That is, reading and writing as meaningful practice is always inherently bound up with some way or ways of being in the world. The tools or technologies of literacy (from print to computers) are always situated and employed within contexts of practice which permit certain productions of meaning and constrain others (see Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996: 2-3).

iii. Literacy after the typographic era

Even if we were to accept the traditional skill/tool/ability to encode and decode view of literacy, it is clear that constraining this conception within the parameters of 'the typographic' - alphabetic print - is passé. It is fundamentally inadequate to current social needs and purposes, let alone those of the future.

The salience of this point is well captured by Manuel Castells (1996: 328), among many others. Castells speaks of the current technological revolution having created a 'Super Text and a Meta-Language' that integrates 'the written, oral and audio-visual modalities of human communication' into a single system for the first time in human history. According to Castells, the increasing integration

of text, images, and sounds in the same system, interacting from multiple points, in chosen time (real or delayed) along a global network, in conditions of open and affordable access, does fundamentally change the character of communication. And communication decisively shapes culture . . . Because culture is mediated and enacted through communication, cultures themselves, that is our historically produced systems of beliefs and codes, become fundamentally transformed, and will be more so over time, by the new technological system (Castells 1996: 328).

The implication of this is clear, especially at a time when government policies are prioritizing development and access to 'the Information Superhighway'. Those whose literacy education is constrained within the limits of 'the typographic' will be denied access to understanding, and participating in developing and transforming cultures of the information society on equal terms with those enjoyed by learners whose literacy education is not thus constrained.

iv. The nature and implications of an emerging 'new word order'

Much that lies at the heart of the framework I am trying to develop here turns on what I see as the danger that current trends in policy and practice may bring the emergence and consolidation of 'a new word order' - particularly in conjunction with what James Gee, Glynda Hull and I (1996) call the 'new work order'. Current trends in literacy policy formulations seem likely, if they are not redressed in the practical implementations of policy within our pedagogy, to contribute to entrenching a highly stratified literate population. This would have grievous implications for any serious access and equity/social justice ideal for the society as a whole, and, more specifically, for the overarching ideal of literacy education sketched above.

Four different constructions of literacy have emerged in key reform texts. I call these the

'lingering basics', the 'new basics', 'elite literacies', and 'foreign language literacy'. I will sketch these briefly in turn.

The notion of literacy basics (or basic literacy) as mastery of fundamentals of encoding and decoding print texts (including elementary math operations) continues to 'linger' from the 1960s and 70s. This 'lingering' notion of basics is framed in terms of mastering the building blocks of code breaking: knowing the alphabetic script visually and phonetically, and grasping the mechanism of putting elements of the script together to encode or decode words, and to separate words or add them together to read and write sentences. Remedial literacy programs focus on accuracy and self-correction in reading aloud exercises, and correct spelling in written work. Remedial students are subjected to batteries of word and dictation activities and tests, as well as exercises concerned with letter identification and concepts about print. Teachers are required to maintain accurate and comprehensive records for diagnosis, validation, and accountability purposes. This is the notion of basic literacy competence for school learners as mastery of generalisable techniques and concepts that are presumed to be building blocks for subsequent education.

A central motif in current thinking about education and training is that the 'old - or lingering - basics' are no longer sufficient for effective participation in modern societies. The qualitative shifts in social practices variously associated with transition from an agri-industrial economy to a post-industrial information/services economy; from 'fordism' to 'post-fordism'; from more personal face-to-face communities to impersonal metropolitan and, even, virtual communities; from a paternal (welfare) state to a more devolved state requiring greater self-sufficiency, and so on; are seen to call for qualitatively more sophisticated ('smart'), abstract, symbolic-logical capacities than were needed in the past. In new times, it is argued, the old 'base' needs to be raised. As 'new basics', literacy is seen as a combination of 'critical thinking' - a generic grab bag for higher order skills of comprehension, problem solving and analysis - and reading, writing, speaking and listening. Australia's Language (DEET 1991: 5) refers to 'effective literacy' as the literacy baseline for Australians, defining it as 'intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and involv[ing] the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking with reading and writing'.

Ideals of education for excellence have generated talk of higher order literacies, understood as high level mastery of subject discipline literacies, such that being literate means here to be able to manipulate symbols, theories and theoretical knowledge, information, etc., in the manner of scientists, mathematicians, various sorts of designers and engineers, advertisers, writers and composers, and so on. Such 'elite' literacies can be understood in terms of

mastering the 'languages' and 'literatures' (Hirst 1974) of academic disciplines. The language of an academic discipline refers to the 'logic' or process of inquiry within that field. A discipline's literature comprises the 'content' of work in the field - the accumulated attainments of people working in that subject area.

Command of the language and literature of a field of inquiry permits critique, innovation, variation, diversification, refinement, and so on, to occur. This may range from producing entirely new approaches to managing organisations, or new kinds of computer hardware and software (from mainframe to PC; DOS to Windows, addition of sound and video), to producing new reporting processes for literacy attainment and new ways of conceiving literacy; from variations within architectural and engineering design, to variations on mass produced commodities which provide a semblance of individuality or novelty.

This is very much the literacy of what Robert Reich (1992) calls 'symbolic analysis', and Peter Drucker (1993) calls 'knowledge work'. This is now widely seen as the real 'value-adding' work within modern economies. The scientist, historian, architect, software designer, composer, management theorist, and electronic engineer, all manipulate, modify, refine, combine, and in other ways employ symbols contained in or derived from the language and literature of their disciplines to produce new knowledge, innovative designs, new applications of theory, and so on. These can be drawn on to 'add maximum value' to raw materials and labour in the process of producing goods and services. Increasingly, the critical dimension of knowledge work is valued mainly, if not solely, in terms of value-adding economic potential. It is critical analysis and critical judgment directed toward innovation and improvement within the parameters of a field or enterprise, rather than criticism in larger terms which might hold the field and its applications and effects, or an enterprise and its goals, up to scrutiny.

The fourth construction of literacy highlighted in much current literacy policy is what I call 'foreign language literacy'. To a large extent this also may be seen as an 'elite' construction of literacy. Following decades of decline in percentages of students learning a foreign language in schools, colleges and universities (DEET 1991: 15; Toch 1991: 8), recent educational policy directions have given renewed attention to enhancing second language proficiency. Justifications often foreground 'humanist' considerations in support of foreign language proficiency and bilingualism, but sooner or later economic motives generally emerge as the real reason behind efforts to promote foreign language proficiency. Two main factors have generated the emergence of second language literacy education as a new (and pressing) capitalist instrumentality. First, trading partners have changed greatly for

Anglophone countries, and many of our new partners have not been exposed to decades (or centuries) of colonial or neo-colonial English language hegemony. Second, trade competition has become intense. Many countries now produce commodities previously produced by relatively few. Within this context of intensified competition, the capacity to market, sell, inform, and provide after sales support in the customer's language becomes a crucial element of competitive edge. In this context, aside from the more narrowly and crassly pragmatic economic motif, foreign language literacy is integral to diverse practices of symbolic analysis and manipulation in the form of translating creative and scientific works, developing ideas, theories, designs, etc., collaboratively across linguistic difference, and so on.

Within post-industrial economies work is becoming increasingly dominated by polarised forms of service work: namely, 'symbolic analytic services' on one hand, and 'routine production' and 'in-person' services on the other. Furthermore, modern organisations aim to infuse a sense of responsibility for the success of the enterprise throughout the entire organisation, and to push decision-making, problem-solving, and productive innovation as far down toward 'front line' workers as possible.

Symbolic-analytic work provides services in the form of data, words, and oral and visual representations: diverse problem-identifying, problem-solving, and strategic brokering activities, spanning the work of research scientists, all manner of engineers (from civil to sound), management consultants, investment bankers, systems analysts, authors, editors, art directors, video and film producers, musicians, and so on. Framed as substantial value-adding work within the post-industrial information economy, it is the best paid work. By contrast, beyond demands for basic numeracy and the ability to read, 'routine' work often calls primarily for reliability, loyalty, and the capacity to take direction, and, in the case of in-person service workers, 'a pleasant demeanour'. Seen as low value-adding work, and with huge (global) labour pools, this work is poorly paid.

This polarisation broadly reflects the order of difference between elite literacies and the 'lingering' (old) basic literacy. Somewhere in between we find the complication introduced by the changed rules of manufacturing and competition, mentioned by Wiggenhorn (1990) - the need for workers to solve a lot of their own problems, operate self-directing teams, and understand concepts and procedures of quality, etc. - seen as requiring mastery of the 'new basics.' While this work, like the previous category of 'routine' work, is often not well paid, it presupposes a 'higher order basics' than previously and, to the extent that it is not well paid entails economic exploitation (as, of course, does routine work calling only for

'lingering basics').

This is a point at which interpreting and evaluating literacy policy, and implementing it in critically informed ways becomes of great importance. We need to be alert to risks inherent in the combination between a narrow mechanical view of literacy as 'encoding and decoding text' and the huge priority currently being attached to 'the lingering basics'. It will be crucial at the point of implementing the literacy plan in pedagogy that we do not contribute to 'fixating' learners in low order conceptions and practices of literacy. And in the case of NESB learners we must beware that paying attention to 'lingering' concerns and producing 'gains' in 'the basics' are not undertaken at the expense of promoting competence in higher order literacies construed as sociocultural and embedded practices (see Michele Knobel's account of Jacques for a classic instance of the point at issue. Knobel 1997, 1998). Unless we are careful here we may unwittingly contribute to consolidating a new word order which will mediate in powerful ways access by individuals and groups to places and rewards within the new work order, as well as evolving civic and cultural domains. For all the importance we rightly attach to promoting the 'lingering' basics and the 'new' basics, it is important to recognise that principles of inclusive education and inclusive literacy will be subverted to the extent that access to mastering other literacies and life chances become systematically blocked for various groups and strata on account of literacy education policies and practices.

v. Cultural apprenticeship approaches to learning and pedagogy

The sociocultural perspective has further implications and corollaries for literacy education. Two are especially important here, and will provide a lead in to what I want to say about a cultural apprenticeship approach to literacy education. The following ideas have been developed in collaboration with Jim Gee and Glynda Hull, as presented in The New Work Order (1996: 4-5, 15-16).

First, let us take Gee's idea that when we take a sociocultural approach to literacy we move our focus from 'the mind' and, ultimately, 'the school' and, instead, focus on 'the world' - which is the context of social practice.

In a sociocultural approach, the focus of learning and education is not children, nor schools,

but human lives seen as trajectories through multiple social practices in various social institutions. If learning is to be efficacious, then what a child or adult does now as a learner must be connected in meaningful and motivating ways with 'mature' (insider) versions of related social practices. (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996: 4)

The second idea is closely related to the first. It is that meaningful - sensible and purposeful - learning is what Gee calls 'a process of entry into and participation in a Discourse' (ibid.: 15) - of becoming capable of playing socially meaningful 'roles' and being identifiable as a member of some recognisable group, class, or network. Discourses are combinations of ways of acting, thinking, feeling, believing, dressing, gesturing, valuing, behaving, speaking, reading and writing, and so on. To be in a Discourse means that others - who are familiar with the Discourses - can recognise us as being a 'this' or a 'that' (e.g., a lawyer, mother, teacher, netballer, carpenter), or a particular 'version' of a this or a that (e.g., a courtroom lawyer, a traditionalist teacher, progressivist teacher, beginning teacher, a 'middle class' mother, a jobbing carpenter, a social netballer etc.). They can recognise us as such by virtue of how we are speaking, reading, writing, believing, valuing, feeling, acting, gesturing, and so on. Language is a dimension of Discourse, but only one dimension, and Gee uses discourse (with a small 'd') to mark this relationship.

We achieve command of Discourses within their organic contexts of operation (which is why virtually all children learn to speak their 'first language variant' effectively). For example, we master various games or sports Discourses by playing them. We can augment and inform our performance (competence) by reading about and otherwise studying them (e.g., by attending games as spectators, particularly in the company of expert players). But the main condition that makes our performance fluent and competent is active participation in 'mature' versions of the Discourses in question: involvement in real games and in serious relevant approximations (net practice, etc.). Generic skills and capacities (hand-eye co-ordination, ability to think ahead, plan moves, etc.) are important, but their effective application requires practised knowledge of the context, the Discourse.

These and previous considerations generate deep questions and issues about school literacies, school Discourse(s), and school learning and school learning in relation to 'mature' versions of social practices (and their embedded literacies) and, to that extent, subsequent points in learners' lives viewed as trajectories. School learning undoubtedly engages learners in a Discourse - sometimes known as 'doing school' - albeit with dramatically different achievement outcomes for different groupings of students according to the degree of (mis)fit/match between their other familiar Discourses and the more or less

distinctive school Discourse (and its sub-Discourses: school geography, school physics, school English/language, school French, and so on). This raises at least two questions.

First, how far does school learning articulate with any Discourses beyond its own and, to that extent, provide sound foundations for competence at later points in trajectories? It is important to note here that the National Plan relates literacy work very closely to enabling participation in school learning. This needs to be put in perspective, however. On this, we have suggested that schools 'don't merely separate learning from participation in 'mature' Discourses: they render the connection entirely mysterious' (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996: 15).

Second, the question needs to be faced squarely: to what extent should school learning articulate with other Discourses? 'The separation between school-based Discourses and outside may be a good thing, or it may not' (ibid.: 16).

Diverse issues emerge from all this. For example, teachers themselves often are not on the inside of mature versions of those Discourses to which school Discourses are meant to relate or correspond. Compare, for example, maths and science educators as opposed to mathematicians and scientists; English/language teachers as opposed to report writers, journalists, novelists, minutes takers, Web page designers, editors, etc. Further, and relatedly, school literacies often appear downright 'odd' in relation to 'real things' - as students themselves are often acutely aware; not to mention bemused or confused by. The 'snapshots' of Jacques and Layla developed from Michele Knobel's fieldwork provide typical illustrations here (Knobel 1997, 1998; Lankshear and Knobel 1997: 175-78).

Such things have profound implications for literacy policies pertaining to matters like benchmarks, assessment and reporting, use of 'community resources', and teacher professional development. To cut short what would otherwise be a very long story, let me pick up just two points here - the second being the avowed concern of this sub-section.

1. The first is a trope for wider concerns, and relates most directly to issues of assessment, reporting, benchmarking, and the like. In some of my recent research I've become intrigued by issues arising from items used in adult literacy surveys employed in a cluster of OECD countries, including Australia (see ABS 1997a and b). These items are allegedly stand-ins

for what adults are supposed to do/have to do in their everyday lives. The first thing that struck me about them was that while I had no difficulty doing them they don't look remotely like the practices I engage in day to day or the ways I engage in them. That is, I don't do my life the way the items do their testing. Nor, seemingly do a lot of other people. The Australian survey contained a 'qualitative' component that surveyed respondents on what they actually do literacy-wise, and how they rate their capacity to do these things.

Some interesting findings emerged. While 92% of those who rated their reading skills as poor relative to 'the needs of daily life' indeed scored at the lowest level of the prose scale assessment, a very significant 28% of those who self-rated their reading skills as excellent were subsequently assessed at the two lowest levels of performance. Conversely, only 79% of those who rated their mathematical skills as poor scored at the lowest level. In other words, there were significant differences between the 'subjective' and 'objective' assessments. The ABS report comments as follows on the reading aspect:

It may seem incongruous that some people who were objectively assessed as having relatively poor literacy skills rated their skills as excellent or good. One possible explanation for this is that people with lower skill levels (as measured by the objective assessment) who had little need to use advanced skills in daily life may consider that their skills are good enough to meet the demands placed on them, and, accordingly, rate their skills for the needs of daily life as good, or even excellent. (ibid.: 9)

Indeed! This is sufficient to raise reasonable doubt about the relationship between survey items and what people actually do in their daily lives, and the ways they set about negotiating information, meaning, and other communication demands. Moreover, relatively small proportions of those assessed at the lowest level in the Australian study used (14%) or wrote (10%) reports, articles, magazines, journals, invoices, bills, spreadsheets, etc., on anything like a daily basis. This is not to say that they should not be able to do these things well, or that they will not need to do them routinely in the future. It does, however, imply that large numbers of people actually experience themselves as functioning competently under present real life conditions with what they can already do - and that this is being adjudged poor and, by extension, inadequate.

Recent work in South Africa augments this picture. Two brief examples must suffice. In the first, Catherine Kell (1996) describes the work of an ANC activist, Winnie Tsotso. Tsotso is a local ANC branch organiser, a long-standing member of the squatters' Civic Association,

and serves on the local health, pre-school, and Catholic Welfare and Development committees. She also runs a soup kitchen for pensioners - purchasing, preparing and serving the food. She is a qualified first aid worker, and more besides. In a 'technical' sense she is illiterate and sees herself as such, yet by means of social procedures she has developed with others she easily manages the print requirements of her various roles.

Within the welfare and political domains … her role is that of a leader and an authority. Despite her inability to decipher much print, she plays a very important and highly valued role as a literacy mediator. In a process of reciprocity, she draws on her well-developed networks of support [Fingeret, 1983] and also on the extensive knowledge she has acquired informally through apprenticeship and guided participation [Rogoff, 1988] in liberation politics and welfare bureaucracy. (Kell 1996: 242)

In these respects and domains, although not in others, she is literate in the sense of handling the language requirements of multiple Discourses (Gee 1996). Literacy is not an end in itself, and effective literacy is by definition a matter of handling textual requirements within social practices: in situ. Interestingly, Kell contrasts Tsotso's struggling efforts to deal with literacy learning in a beginners' class with her fluent competence in diverse text-mediated social practices.

In a second example, Diana Gibson (1996) describes the elaborate 'reading' and 'numeracy' practices of 'illiterate unschooled' Coloured farm workers in calculating amounts of money and materials required for certain tasks (e.g., building wagons, purchasing supplies) and enacting elaborate diagrams (e.g., in constructing irrigation systems). By all such constructions of literacy as those employed in surveys like the NALS, or presupposed in typical literacy assessments and programs, these farm workers were illiterate. Yet their operations were accurate and highly efficient: so much so that the workers themselves and their employer regarded them as 'farm literate', and this 'working intelligence' was a key factor in making them more powerful than the conventionally literate women on the farm.

It doesn't require too much imagination here to raise very significant issues about benchmarks, assessment, reporting, remediation, etc., as current policy emphases in relation to the actual lived demands of daily life. For example, if the point of reference for foundational literacy is to be 'later points in life trajectories', our benchmarking and assessing will have to be undertaken very carefully. If, however, the emphasis remains where it seems to be at present - to enable participation in school - we need to ask some

fundamental questions about school purposes in relation to wider questions. More generally, it raises fundamental questions about who gets to set the benchmarks and on what grounds they are being set. Are they adequate and appropriate grounds? The potential value of having benchmarks could be completely undermined if the 'logic' of the benchmarks formally implemented is misguided.

2. We come, finally, to cultural apprenticeship approaches to learning. In an account of what more 'authentic' school-based curriculum and pedagogy might look like, Heath and McLaughlin (1994: 472) critique classroom pedagogies which 'create "authenticity" artificially rather than study contextually authentic curricula - authentic to youth - in supportive organizational structures'. They argue that classroom educators can learn much from examining effective grass-roots organisations like the Girl Guides, Girls Club, and drama groups. These provide rich social contexts and opportunities for 'learning to learn for anything' everyday by means of '[cognitive and social] apprenticeship, peer learning, authentic tasks, skill-focused practices and real outcome measures', such as completed public projects, performances, displays and exhibitions (ibid.). Heath and McLaughlin believe these characteristic features of effective authentic learning converge in Barbara Rogoff's (1990; also Rogoff 1995) account of learning through sociocultural activity.

Rogoff advances three planes of analysis for interpreting and evaluating learning. These are apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation. They correspond with community, interpersonal, and personal processes. While these planes are mutually constituting, interdependent and inseparable, identifying them individually enables particular aspects of a learning process to be brought into sharp focus for analytic purposes.

According to Rogoff, 'apprenticeship' operates within a plane of community and institutional activity and describes 'active individuals participating with others in culturally organized ways' (1995:142). The primary purpose of apprenticeship is to facilitate 'mature participation in the activity by less experienced people' (ibid.). Experts - who continue to develop and refine their expertise - and peers in the learning process are integral to Rogoff's account of apprenticeship (Rogoff 1995, p. 143). Both categories of participant find themselves 'engaging in activities with others of varying experience' and moving through cycles of learning, teaching, and practice. Investigating and interpreting sociocultural apprenticeship focuses attention on the activity being learned (with its concomitant skills, processes, and content knowledge), and on its relationship with community practices and institutions - eschewing traditional conceptions of apprenticeship as an expert-novice dyad.

'Guided participation' encompasses 'processes and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and co-ordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity' (ibid.). It involves a range of interpersonal interactions. These include face-to-face interactions, side-by-side interactions (which are more frequent face-to-face interactions within everyday life), and other interactional arrangements where activities do not require everyone involved to be present. Hence, for Rogoff, guidance is provided by 'cultural and social values, as well as [by] social partners' who may be local or distant (1995, p. 142; also Rogoff 1984).

'Participatory appropriation' refers to personal processes of ongoing and dynamic engagement with learning through socially contextualised and purposeful activities that ultimately transform the learner. Rogoff uses this concept to describe processes by which people 'transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation' (Rogoff 1995, p. 150). Here analysis focuses on changes that learners undergo in gaining facility with an activity, as well as acceptable changes learners make to activities in the process of becoming 'experts', enabling them to engage with subsequent similar activities and their social meanings.

As a model of pedagogy for effective learning, cultural apprenticeship has important implications for literacy education. By grounding learning as far as possible within settings where genuine opportunities are available for apprenticeship to skills and procedures, and where conditions exist for guided participation and participatory appropriation, it minimises counterproductive forms of abstract(ed) and decontextualised activity. At the same time it allows for skill refinement through repetition, drilling and the like (c.f., the practice and training dimensions of sports and games) - but within situations and settings that approximate to 'the real thing'. With the drilling, habituation, repetition, in other words, come also concrete and embodied experiences of participation that convey situated cultural understanding.

At the same time, the cultural apprenticeship model is basically one of enculturation: learners are recruited to Discourses 'from the inside'. While this may be very effective for mastering operational and cultural dimensions of literacy, it may work against the 'critical'. This recovers for classroom learning an important role which - almost by definition - cannot be undertaken in situ and in role: i.e., the tasks of identifying and judging the values, purposes, interests, perspectives, and the like that are written into a Discourse, and those that are thereby written out.

Some typical applications of the framework

How, and at what points, might this framework be applied to examining aspects of current literacy policy? The following suggestions are no more than hints at possibilities for further consideration - constraints of space working against more detailed development.

i. At a quite specific level, the framework has implications for how we approach the implementation of policy initiatives like benchmarks. For example, benchmarks would need to be framed in ways that honour literacy as sociocultural practice. They could not be reduced to (merely) textual 'lowest common denominators', since text stands to literacy as discourse stands to Discourse in Gee's conceptual scheme (Gee 1991; 1996; 1997). Moreover, benchmarks would need to take account of the operational, cultural and critical dimensions of literacy. In addition, assessment would need to be of literacy in practice: that is, as an embedded and integrated component of Discourse events or 'moves'. Otherwise, benchmarking will end up mirroring the worst counterproductive moments of highly mechanical decontextualised assessment of 'competencies' in workplace settings.

ii. The notion of 'foundational' literacy (or literacies) is problematised in productive ways by the framework outlined here. First, the question, 'foundational to/for what?', must emerge as a serious issue to be addressed in relation to debate about the purposes of schooling and, in particular, in terms of the desirable relationship between school learning and outside Discourses which are germane to learners' life trajectories. Interestingly, in this regard, the entire domain of literacies associated with new technologies is omitted from drafts to date of the literacy benchmarks. Yet, these literacies are increasingly central to social practices of the everyday, and will only become more so. Anybody who believes that operational aspects of encoding and decoding print text need simply to be applied to computer-mediated practices as 'foundations' within some linear structural sequence does not understand literacy as practice. Properly construed, 'foundational' elements of new technological literacies include all-important cultural and critical understandings and knowledge, as well as operational knowledge and understanding that go far beyond mere encoding and decoding: as any young person involved in establishing and maintaining

bulletin boards could have told us five years ago, and as those involved in building and maintaining Web sites, listservs, MOOs, chat spaces, and the like continue to attest.

Second, the presumption that the foundational referent for school-based literacy learning should be participation in school needs careful consideration. Schooling is seriously out of touch with the discursive universe beyond its gates. As Richard Smith reminds us, in relation to new technologies, new practices and literacies are being 'invented on the streets' (in workplaces, online communities, businesses, homes, recreation spaces, etc. - Richard Smith, personal communication), as people find ways of making new technologies useful for meeting their purposes and goals in economic, civic, domestic, cultural, and recreational life. If learners are to acquire effective technological literacies and learn how to use new technologies proficiently, they need access to purposeful contexts and applications. Teachers need to have a sense of what these are, how to get them into the classroom and, where necessary, how to get the classroom to them.

Finally, we need to ask of foundational literacy, 'foundational on what dimensions?' If foundational literacy is too narrowly confined to the operational and/or to established school 'ways' (see Heath 1983; Knobel and Lankshear 1997), which de facto generate 'word orders' and subvert learning for life (as in 'the everyday') we should expect no significant gains in terms of access and equity at the points that really matter: viz., equity in life chances, successful negotiations of changing times, active and effective participation in civic affairs, and so on.

iii. Issues of professional development are also repositioned by the framework outlined here. In fact, a lot of what is currently envisaged in policy formulations for professional development might better be addressed by other means - e.g., by recruiting educators from different 'pools': such as pools of already established expertise which can be brought to schooling in ways that cohere with pedagogy as cultural apprenticeship - rather than trying to remake teachers as expert practitioners across endless and shifting fronts. The framework suggests, among other things, that quick fix packages of professional development are unlikely to deliver what is needed, since the depth of expertise involved in 'literacy proficiency' calls for prolonged acquisition inside Discourses, not rapid-fire learning (c.f., Gee 1991, 1996). Any teacher grappling with new technological literacies in the presence of youngsters who have absorbed them into their lifeblood knows this only too well.

From the standpoint of pedagogy as cultural apprenticeship, professional development for

literacy educators will require paying as much attention to developing understanding and mastery of procedures and principles associated with apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation as it will to providing teachers with further exposure to specialist techniques and options for teaching the operational basics of encoding and decoding print. These aspects, and more besides, will be crucial to the professional development mix, but any or some on their own cannot be sufficient.

iv. The framework also provides a perspective on currently popular policy notions of school-home-community partnerships focused on literacy education ('support a reader', 'parents as educators', etc.). Recent policy initiatives in Australia and abroad have sought ways of involving parents and other community members more closely in the life of the school, particularly with a view to enhancing learning outcomes among identifiable low achieving social groups. Often this is construed in terms of providing additional human resources in the classroom (untrained or, at best, 'trained on the cheap') to assist the teacher with routine tasks related to reading, classroom management, and the like. An added benefit often attributed to such arrangements is familiarising parents and 'relevant others' with school routines to better acquaint them with school criteria and purposes which bear on homework, assignments and the like.

While mention is also made in some instances to enabling teachers thereby to better understand 'the community', it is difficult to resist the view that these initiatives mainly emphasise the need for parents and communities to change in ways that better adapt them to school ways. Concha Delgado-Gaitan (1990, especially Ch 3) distinguishes three directional 'flows' of influence between schools, homes and communities. The first is that noted above: homes and communities must become better adapted to the school. The second is the opposite: schools need to better understand and adapt to life beyond the school. (Beyond considerations of literacy education alone, this position is strongly associated with demands from business and industry sectors.) The third, not surprisingly, is a reciprocal flow: both ways.

The framework I have proposed leans toward Delgado-Gaitan's third position. Schools need to ground literacy education much more deeply and concretely in understandings, procedures, and practices engaged in 'outside school Discourses', and to draw more directly on (best approximations to) organic contexts and resources conducive to literacy education as cultural apprenticeship and situated learning extending beyond characteristically school forms. At the same time, literacy education must transcend (mere) enculturation, by providing structured opportunities for critical reflection upon and appraisal of social

practices and their literacies, as well as undertaking within classroom settings those things (yet to be clearly determined?) that are genuinely best done in classrooms and that are integral to literacy education equal to the demands of our times. The challenge is to pursue better mixes than currently prevail.

Conclusion

Policy formulations are no sure indicator of material outcomes. Much depends on how those with the effective power to implement policy understand that policy and translate it into action. This paper has tried, in a preliminary way, to outline components of a framework to help guide scrutiny and uptake of current policy, and to inform our ongoing attempts to influence the directions of future policy formulations, in the hope that the purposes espoused for the National Literacy Plan might be realised in substance.

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